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Attack and Parry: An Examination of Gubernatorial Rhetoric and Agenda Setting for Higher Education in Texas, 2000-2015

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Texas higher education saw significant growth and change from 2000 to 2015. Driven by the strategic goals of the state's *Closing the Gaps* higher education plan, the state saw significant increases in higher education enrollment and outcomes. Postsecondary enrollment increased by 589,741 students. Institutions conferred 9,612 more STEM degrees in 2015 than in 2000, and nearly every public four-year institution saw a dramatic increase in the number of annual bachelor's degrees awarded (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). Incentivized by initiatives such as the Texas Research Incentive Program, eight public four-year doctoral institutions earned classification as Emerging Research Universities. The state's two public flagships, The University of Texas at Austin (UT-Austin) and Texas A&M University, increased their research expenditures and national rankings (Hamilton, 2012).

At the same time, public higher education in Texas experienced profound criticism from conservative interest groups, political donors, and political appointees. In 2003, Governor Perry approved the Legislature's decision to deregulate tuition rates; this policy shift ushered in a new era of heightened concern over increasing tuition and decreasing affordability (Hamilton, 2011a). The right-wing Texas Public Policy Foundation released two reports: *Seven Breakthrough Solutions to Reform Higher Education*, followed by a *Red and Black Report* compiled from public data on Texas A&M faculty members' return on investment for the university (Burka 2012; Hamilton 2011b). At UT-Austin, tension between President Bill Powers and Governor Perry's appointees to the UT Board of Regents escalated to produce Powers' resignation in 2015 (Taliaferro, 2014).

Texas exemplifies the ideological debate over higher education as a public good, the value of research, and the role of the state in governing public universities. Combined with the aforementioned political forces at play during this time, the state's size and scope make Texas an ideal case study for higher education politics and policy. Indeed, ranking second of all U.S. states in population and higher education enrollment (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2014; U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), Texas is significant both to the national political context and to U.S. postsecondary education.

The purpose of this study was to examine the gubernatorial rhetoric and agenda setting for higher education in Texas during this controversial period of growth and change. To do so, we looked to public speeches by Governor Rick Perry, a strong advocate for conservative higher education reforms and the most public face of the Texas higher education debate (Hamilton, 2014). We addressed two research questions: 1) How does Governor Perry *frame* the political agenda around higher education in Texas from 2000-2015? and 2) How does Governor Perry *prime* Texans to support his higher education reform agenda?

Literature Review

Agenda setting, first identified by journalist Walter Lippman in 1922, originally referred to the media's ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda (McCombs, 2002). The concept has been broadly applied to actors outside the media and within political science and refers

to the actions of political elites to make certain issues salient during a given political debate. *Framing* – the way in which political elites speak about a given issue, and *priming* – readying voters and other constituents to thematically connect political concepts, are natural extensions of agenda setting (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw, 1998). In short, political elites set the agenda of policy issues they want to address, frame those policy issues in a way that is favorable to their preferred positions, and prime constituents to receive that information.

One of the dominant theories of policy formation applied by researchers today is Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams model. Kingdon argued that three distinct streams coincide to create conditions ripe for policy change. In the problem stream, public and political elite attention turns to a specific policy problem. The policy stream contains the potential political solutions to given policy problems. Finally, in the politics stream, political elites are motivated to turn political solutions into policy. When the three streams coincide, a policy window opens through which political entrepreneurs can make policy. Kingdon posited that policy entrepreneurs with political capital, skill, and expertise could deftly manipulate the three streams and leverage policy windows in order to move their own agendas to fruition.

Governors are important policy entrepreneurs and can impact each of these streams through the various roles they play (Christakis, 2009; Mintrom, 1997). They serve as the chief executive for their states and appoint executive branch officials who will create policy solutions. They lobby legislators for their preferred policy prescriptions, impacting the politics stream. Perhaps their most important role, however, is that of agenda setter, drawing attention to issues within the problem stream. Governors set out a vision for their states and try to persuade legislators to follow that vision.

Governors also belong to a particular group of policy entrepreneurs: those seeking election and re-election. The classical view of elected officials suggests these policy entrepreneurs advocate for policy that helps them achieve at least one of three major goals – enacting effective public policy, earning re-election, or gaining political power (Fenno, 2003). Fenno (1977) applied these goals to federal representatives' communication behavior with four major constituencies. These constituencies and goals, however, also apply to all political figures, especially to those at the state level. The first constituency is geographic and refers to those people who live in their area of representation (Fenno, 1977). In the case of Governor Perry, the entirety of the state of Texas serves as his geographic constituency. The second constituency is their re-election constituency, or the group of people who are likely to support a candidate for re-election. The third is the primary constituency, meaning those who would likely vote for a candidate in the primary process. Fourth, the personal constituency refers to those who know the political figure personally (Fenno, 1977). Political candidates therefore, develop different speaking and communication styles for interacting with each constituency. Fenno called this phenomenon the politicians' home styles, describing the ways they discuss policy with constituents in order to achieve goals of policy, power, and re-election (Fenno, 1977).

Scholars have also examined the gubernatorial role in higher education. Notably, McLendon (2003) found that governors were key agenda setters in state higher education decentralization efforts in Arkansas, Hawaii, and Illinois. Christakis (2009) argued that governors are dominant stakeholders in higher education; his study of gubernatorial influence classified Texas as an entrepreneurial governor state, with strong budget authority but informal rather than statutory influence over the agenda.

Conceptual Framework

In addition to literature on agenda setting and political priming and framing discussed above (e.g., Lippman, 1922; Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw 1998), we applied discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) to this research because of our interest in examining discourse as social phenomena. Discourse theory posits that meaning is dynamic and reality is unknowable; discourse requires analysis and interpretation. Guided by discourse theory, our interest is in “exploring patterns in and across the statements and identifying the social consequences of different discursive representations of reality” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 22). Discourse theory treats text itself as a research subject, examining relationships among its expressions and articulations and seeking to identify the discourses, values, and symbols the text draws from or perpetuates (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002).

Our conceptual framework was also informed by literature on the influence of governors in state agenda setting, particularly higher education. Governors are the most visible political figure in their states, and gubernatorial influence has arguably increased across the U.S. since the 1960s (Dilger, 1989; Lane & Adler, 1988; Weerts, 2002). According to Lane and Adler (1988), the governor is the most important state policymaker for both public and higher education because of his or her three major roles as chief state executive, chief state budget officer, and chief opinion leader (p. 2). Governors also exert influence through appointments to state higher education offices, commissions, and boards of regents. According to Christakis (2009), “The lack of attention to gubernatorial power over public higher education presents a striking void in the examination of a central figure in a state’s relationship with its public university system” (p. 98). We focused here on the role of the governor as a policy entrepreneur with the influence and authority to shape the state’s higher education agenda (Kingdon, 1995; Mintrom, 1997).

Methods

We examined gubernatorial agenda setting around higher education policy in Texas, focusing on the ways in which Governor Perry framed his higher education agenda and primed constituents to receive his message. Because agenda setting requires a public audience, we used Perry’s most high-profile public speeches as the basis for our dataset. We chose not to include stump speeches from Perry’s unsuccessful 2012 and 2016 presidential campaigns. Perry’s target audiences during those campaigns were not the same as those he addresses as Governor; in short, his four constituencies for those campaigns were dramatically different, as he had to communicate to a geographic constituency of the United States presidential electorate rather than that of Texas. We also included speeches given specifically on subjects related to higher education. In total, our dataset included six State of the State addresses, three inaugural addresses, 18 education addresses, and one outgoing address for a total of 28 speeches over a period spanning 2001 to 2015. Speeches in our dataset are listed in Appendix A.

We employed a twofold approach to the analysis of Rick Perry’s speeches as Governor of Texas during this time. First, we assumed that major speeches from the Governor represented the Governor’s aspirations and goals for the state at a given time period. In doing so, we expected he was attempting to communicate with geographic, re-election, primary and personal constituencies while also serving as policy entrepreneur. Therefore, multiple mentions of a policy issue or specific frame in Perry’s speeches as Governor would suggest an attempt to pull multiple streams together to impact policymaking. To assess the extent to which Governor Perry focused on specific policy issues, we used a manifest-coding scheme. We created a counting program in STATA that searched

for key words and phrases within Perry's speeches.¹ The program then created indicator variables for the presence of words that dealt with higher education policy. Our approach is consistent with a widely used form of content analysis of qualitative data (Krippendorff, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Summary statistics and keywords are included in Appendix B.

Second, informed by political discourse analysis theory and methods (Dijk 1997; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002), we conducted qualitative analysis to identify themes, patterns, and recurrent rhetoric appearing within and across the text of these speeches. Each speech was coded in Atlas.ti based first on deductive codes informed by the conceptual framework and literature review then through a second round of inductive coding for emergent patterns and concepts. We used pattern matching (Yin, 2014) and constant comparison (Merriam, 2009) techniques to identify themes across the data.

Findings

In response to our first research question, we found two themes in Governor Perry's framing of the Texas higher education agenda from 2000-2015: (1) emphasis on reforms to increase accountability, efficiency, and affordability, and (2) communicating both priorities and specific strategies to the Legislature.

Regarding our second research question, we found Perry primed voters to receive and value his message by (1) emphasizing higher education's contributions to economic and workforce development, and (2) invoking Texas's tradition of competitiveness and leadership.

Framing the Higher Education Agenda

Across the 28 speeches in our sample, Governor Perry mentioned the words "education" and "higher education" 93% and 53% of the time, respectively. He used the phrase "higher education" an average of 2 times per speech, with a maximum of 10 mentions in both of his speeches specifically addressing higher education reform. Perry's priorities included increased postsecondary accountability, efficiency, and affordability. Our data show the Governor worked not only as an agenda setter, but also as a policy entrepreneur – articulating not only priorities, but specific strategies for the Legislature to pursue.

Reforming for accountability, efficiency, and affordability. Perry's agenda for education opposed complacency and challenged the status quo. In both public schools and higher education, Governor Perry's reforms promoted three overarching values: efficiency, accountability, and affordability. Perry mentioned issues related to tuition in 32% of his speeches, and student debt in almost a fifth of the speeches in the sample. While he talked about affordability in only seven percent of the speeches, he used the word "access" in an impressive 60% of his speeches. Perry mentioned access issues an average of 1.5 times per speech. Mentions of financial aid and tuition occur in 39% and 32% of his speeches, respectively. Perry mentioned financial aid an average of .85 times per speech. Considering the bulk of the speeches included in the sample did not directly focus on issues of high-

¹The counting program requires researchers to divide each speech into lines of 80 or fewer characters. Once the lines are created, it searches for keywords as determined by the researcher, deletes those words from the lines, and counts the number of deleted characters from the line. It then divides the number of deleted characters by the number of characters in the keyword and saves that quotient, before re-inserting the keyword in the line. The quotient effectively serves as a total number of times the keyword appeared in a line. The program then adds the quotients to gain a total number of instances of a keyword within the entirety of a speech. We also transform the total count into an indicator variable for the purposes of this paper.

er education, this mean suggested a qualitatively significant amount of policy focus on issues of financial aid.

Perry often presented the ideals of efficiency, accountability, and affordability as interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Governor Perry emphasized the way in which these values strengthened transparency and taxpayers' understanding of the return on investment of state funds. In 2002, Perry emphasized the connection between accountability and excellence, stating:

A strong system of accountability brings out the greater potential of our children and our schools. As long as I am governor, the state of Texas will not stand for mushy curriculum, weaker standards, or a system of toothless accountability.

This assertion demonstrates the extent to which Perry believed high outcomes required high expectations and oversight. As governor, he presented higher education as a tool for fueling the state's workforce and competitiveness through postsecondary accountability, efficiency, and affordability. Without such an approach, postsecondary education would neglect to serve the state as a driver of economic productivity.

Accountability. Perry sought major reforms to public education finance, accountability, and teacher incentives; as his tenure progressed, he increasingly applied these priorities to higher education. In his 2007 State of the State address, Perry called on the Legislature to improve budget transparency in higher education to improve taxpayer awareness of how state funds were used. In remarks on higher education reform the same year, Governor Perry reiterated:

With greater clarity in budgeting, taxpayers will be able to ensure that their money is being put to good use, yielding a return higher than ever before. If lawmakers adopt this plan, the ultimate result will be a higher education system that is more affordable, more accountable and more focused on meeting the needs of tomorrow's global marketplace.

Perry's emphasis on accountability included advocating for outcomes-based funding for universities, a priority he emphasized for years but was not realized by the Legislature during his time in office. Governor Perry emphasized this funding model in his 2011 and 2012 State of the State addresses. In 2011, he explained how a 2009 review of cost efficiencies he commissioned supported the idea of funding based on performance:

One idea that emerged from that process is called "outcomes-based" funding in which a significant percent of undergraduate funding would be based on the number of degrees awarded. Texans deserve college graduation for their hard-earned tax dollars, not just college enrollment.

Funding based on outcomes aligned with Perry's interest in efficiency and incentivizing shorter time to degree would also mean greater affordability for students and families. Perry again emphasized outcomes-based funding in his 2012 State of the State address:

Under my plan, \$300 million in new funding is tied to schools meeting performance targets. Funding would increase for degrees awarded in critical fields, graduation rates, and success with at-risk students. One of the fundamental changes envisioned by this plan is ensuring more funding follows the students. Ultimately, higher education is not about the buildings we fund but the lives we improve.

Here, Perry invoked the previously discussed tactic of priming Texans to support his education reform efforts by framing education in terms of increasing opportunity and quality of life. To facilitate education's effectiveness to these ends, he argued that the state must incentivize institutions to increase productivity and graduate more students.

Efficiency. Governor Perry's emphasis on graduation outcomes also furthered his interest in improving efficiency for students, institutions, and the state. This phenomenon was underscored

by his mention of business-related practices in higher education in 67% of his speeches and issues of innovation in higher education in 11% of his speeches. In fact, only in Perry's education addresses did he use the words "business" or "innovation," with three mentions of business-related practices in higher education in his May 2010 speech on investment in education. In his 2011 State of the State address, Governor Perry called for reforms to increase educational productivity and value:

Our public institutions had 200,000 more students enrolled in 2010 than they did in 2008, so let's be sure those students and their families are getting the best value for their time and money. Change does not come easily or naturally to these big institutions, but it is critical to educational effectiveness and efficiency.

In this statement and others, Perry's repeated use of terms such as "efficiency," "effectiveness," "reform," "change," and "progress" underscores his business-oriented approach to higher education. In two 2012 speeches addressing education issues, Perry called for specific policy changes in the form of transparency from institutions about cost and time to degree. He asserted:

We're also going to make sure students have a clear picture of how much is at stake when it comes to graduating on time, by requiring universities to inform students how much they'll spend on their degree if they graduate in four years, and how much more it'll cost if it takes five or six. Implementing these measures will meet the growing demand for higher education...in a way that provides encouragement for students to complete their degree in a timely fashion and with financial certainty.

As with greater budget transparency, Perry advocated for open communication from institutions about how student enrollment decisions would affect their educational expenditures. His interest in accountability and efficiency emphasized return on investment of stakeholder resources and better outcomes for the economy if students could graduate and get to work more quickly.

Affordability. In order to serve as a vehicle for opportunity and workforce development, Perry advocated consistently for lowering costs to students and increasing financial aid.

In his 2007 State of the State address, Perry called for new financial aid resources to support Texas students and power the economy into the future:

Today knowledge is more valuable than raw labor, and those nations that prosper by pushing the envelope of innovation are those that invest in vibrant colleges and universities. That's why I have proposed expanding financial aid by \$360 million so Texas can compete in a global economy.

To reach his goal of increasing college affordability, Perry stressed the importance of initiatives such as TEXAS Grants, the state's need-based aid program, and B-On-Time Loan program, which offered zero-interest loans forgiven if students graduated in four years with a B average. In his 2011 State of the State address, Perry famously called for the development of bachelor's degrees costing students \$10,000 or less. He stated:

Today, I'm challenging our institutions of higher education to develop bachelor's degrees that cost no more than \$10,000, including textbooks. Let's leverage web-based instruction, innovative teaching techniques, and aggressive efficiency measures to reach that goal. Imagine the potential impact on affordability and graduation rates, and the number of skilled workers it would send into our economy.

Institutions did indeed respond to this call and incorporated competency-based education into affordable new four-year degrees. By 2013, Perry observed that 13 institutions offered such programs (Hamilton & Gibbs, 2013). In his 2013 State of the State address, Perry praised this progress and added a call to freeze tuition rates for incoming freshmen so costs would not change if they graduated in four years. He explained:

We must do everything we can to continue making higher education an achievable dream for

all Texans. To that end, I've called for a four-year tuition freeze for incoming freshmen... This will provide students and families cost certainty, as their tuition will be locked in at the rate they pay their first semester for the next four years. This will also encourage them to graduate on time, which is a problem we simply can't ignore anymore.

Perry primed voters to support his agenda by emphasizing higher education as a way to pursue individual aspirations. Perry's proposal of a four-year tuition freeze promoted his interest in affordability for students, as well as efficiency and accountability for students, institutions, and the state.

Perry as agenda setter and policy entrepreneur. Governor Perry identified a set of core foci related to higher education and called on the Legislature to pursue those goals. He articulated higher education as a key priority of his governorship, beginning with 2001 remarks in a speech on higher education reform: "There is no more important effort related to our future as a state than that of improving higher education." Subsequently, in 2003, Perry included education among the top priorities outlined in his State of the State address:

We must begin by setting clear and limited priorities. And I will begin by stating my top three priorities for all of you: The education of our children, the security of all Texans, and the fiscal responsibility of our government. Education, because it represents the greatest investment we can make in a future of prosperity. Security, because the economic security of citizens, and the safety of citizens are the core responsibilities of any government. And fiscal responsibility, because neither of these priorities can be met unless our spending is disciplined.

Perry called three special legislative sessions in 2005 and 2006 to address education reform issues (Martins, 2013), and he clearly outlined the objectives he sought for the legislative activity that would occur during that time. In 2005 remarks to the Texas Association of School Administrators and Texas Association of School Boards, Perry prioritized education issues and called for improvements to educational excellence:

For months I have discussed four principles I would like to see achieved... The first, and most important goal, is to improve public education by rewarding educational excellence... We must decide on the final destination first, and then plot the course. Educational excellence is the destination I am seeking and it is where we must focus the most attention as a state. So let me be clear: if we have a special session this year, the subject will not be school finance, it will be educational excellence.

Similarly, in 2006, Perry shared with the Texas Business and Education Coalition: "Let there be no doubt that education reform will be central to the debate of the next 15 months." The Governor's consistent messaging about these priorities solidified his agenda of prioritizing and reforming education, both in public schools and higher education.

Yet Perry's agenda setting extended beyond communicating broad goals and calling on the Legislature to identify policy solutions. Governor Perry set state priorities then outlined specific strategies for the Legislature to adopt in achieving them. A 2007 speech on higher education reform demonstrates his combination of overarching goals and legislative strategies:

Without reform, the global marketplace will continue to march forward, and in a few short years, Texas workers, and the entire Texas economy, will be left behind. That is why today I am proposing major reforms to higher education that will reward colleges and universities for every student that earns a degree, lead to more degrees awarded in critical fields like computer science and nursing, and open new doors of opportunity for thousands of young Texans with an increase of \$360 million in financial aid. There are two cornerstones to this proposal: financial aid and performance-based funding.

In this and subsequent speeches, Governor Perry outlined proposals for outcomes-based funding for universities, four-year tuition freeze for students upon entering college, and expansion of finan-

cial aid funding. He called for the development of STEM academies to strengthen Texas's high-tech workforce, low-cost degree options, and tax credits for employers whose workers earned GEDs. Perry communicated high-level goals as well as specific strategies and tactics, engaging in both agenda setting and policy entrepreneurship as the Governor of Texas.

Priming Texans to Support Postsecondary Reform

Governor Perry's remarks often primed voters to view higher education as a life changing opportunity and important investment for the state. For example, in 2002 remarks on higher education reform, Perry emphasized educational opportunity and aspirations:

We must take greater measures to ensure a college education is the opportunity of all, and not just the dream of some. More young Texans must be trained for the opportunities of tomorrow. That means we must make every effort to attract first generation students to our colleges and universities, while continuing to take innovative steps to ensure our students are ready for college, and able to afford college. A higher education is critical to achieving higher aspirations. We must empower more young Texans to live their dreams.

With remarks like these, Perry primed legislators and voters to hear and support his specific policy proposals to achieve these goals. An excerpt from his 2007 inaugural address shows similar political priming tactics:

Over the last 30 years, because of the grace of God, I have learned my purpose. It is not to build a majority political party, nor to hold power for the sake of holding power, it is to build a Texas of limitless possibility. And it starts with our children. Imagine the possibilities in a Texas where every child is educated, every graduate has access to a good job, every life deemed precious.

Perry established the underlying value of education to Texans before outlining specific strategies to further educational achievement. By priming voters about the importance of education, he could prepare them to understand and appreciate his ideas for reforming schools and universities. Here, we discuss two subthemes related to Perry's priming tactics: connecting higher education to economic and workforce development and invoking Texans' pride in their state's leadership and competitiveness.

Economic and workforce development. Governor Perry used political framing to position higher education as a critical tool for workforce and economic development. In 2005 remarks to school administrators, Perry stated: "Education is the foundation for a future of unlimited opportunity and prosperity. Educated Texans are empowered Texans, empowered to pursue the jobs they desire, and the quality of life of their choosing." Education meant not just following dreams but achieving greater financial security for both the state and its private citizens. Again, in his 2011 inaugural address, Perry called on Texas to "continue investing in our people, developing young minds, grooming and attracting the best and brightest in the fields of science and medicine, giving individuals the tools and the freedom to prosper." Governor Perry primed voters to value higher education as a life changing opportunity then framed educational attainment as essential for a strong economy and comfortable quality of life for all Texans. This approach would resonate with both the basic hopes and dreams of everyday Texans, as well as the economic interests and values of policymakers focused on growing the state's productivity, workforce, and tax base.

Governor Perry prioritized the economy throughout his tenure in office. In his 2015 outgoing address, Perry stated: "As Governor, I have made economic growth my signature initiative." Accordingly, Perry consistently tied the need for accountability, efficiency, and affordability reforms to the state's economic interest. Recall, for example, that when calling for the development of

\$10,000 bachelor's degrees in 2011, Perry referenced "the potential impact on affordability and graduation rates, and the number of skilled workers it would send into our economy." College graduates would fuel the state's workforce. At an earlier statewide education summit in 2006, Perry credited educational progress with improving the Texas economy:

One way to judge whether schools are succeeding is to look at the job climate, because one of the top factors employers consider in choosing where to expand is the presence of an educated workforce. To me, the fact that so many businesses are expanding in Texas is a ringing endorsement of the progress we are making in education.

Indeed, when referring to higher education policy issues, Perry's speeches included an average of 5.2 references to workforce development, with the highest number of references, 22, coming in his 2011 State of the State speech. His references to higher education were often closely followed by economic references. In his 2007 Inaugural address, for example, noted the need "to commit to excellence in higher education as it prepares the workforce of the future." His messaging repeatedly positioned higher education as an economic rather than intellectual engine and a producer of workers more than graduates.

Perry saw the economy and technological innovation as driving the need to reform education. His comments on higher education and the economy often referenced the need to promote STEM training and careers that would prepare workers for new jobs in emerging fields. Perry encouraged investment in related programs as a way to advance the state's workforce. His policies increased state funding for STEM Academies and high school robotics, math, science, and technology programs. Governor Perry also advocated for the UTeach program, which prepared teachers for math and science classrooms. In 2009, he stated: "By emphasizing these core subjects, we can accelerate the pace of our high-tech education, expand opportunity for the young people of our state, and strengthen our state's workforce of the future." The same year, Perry also asserted that "the most important job attractor is a well-educated workforce that is equipped to meet the demands of a high-tech economy." Again in 2012, Perry continued to stress the importance of adapting higher education to meet the needs of a rapidly changing workforce:

It's a vital conversation to have, because higher education in Texas remains in flux, and we're definitely at a crossroads. There are some who want to make sure things stay the same. To an extent, I can understand the emotions behind that, since the Texas system is among the best in the world. But today's highly competitive, ever-evolving economy is demanding a workforce that's more extensively educated, and better prepared for the high-tech jobs of the present and future.

These comments reveal the economic impetus behind Perry's higher education reforms, as well as the tension between the status quo and his vision for the future of higher education in Texas. Perry viewed higher education as outdated in relation to emerging technology and the global economy. This sense of misalignment between academe and the 21st century workforce contributed to his reform agenda, which sought to ensure colleges and universities prepared graduates to help Texas compete and lead in the national and global economy.

Leadership and competitiveness. Perry's speeches revealed strong pride in Texas as a state, an economy, and a system of higher education. In fact, Perry used frames related to Texan exceptionalism 99 times over 28 speeches, for a mean of 3.5 phrases related to Texas pride per speech. The Governor's public statements during this time demonstrated the state's commitment to national leadership and prominence. Perry viewed higher education reforms as a critical strategy to advance Texas's influence and competitiveness; he stated in 2001: "There is no more important effort related to our future as a state than that of improving higher education." In 2009, he urged policymakers to ensure Texas remained a leader in education and economic productivity: "Let's...continue improv-

ing higher education in Texas as we work to achieve and maintain a competitive edge in the global marketplace well into the future.” Public and higher education reforms would enable the Texas economy to excel in the 21st century.

Amidst calls for increased productivity, transparency, and lower costs, Perry also acknowledged the state’s progress and praised Texas as a pioneer in higher education reform. In his 2011 Inaugural address, Governor Perry stated:

The people running some other states are actually pretty smart, and they see what we’ve been doing. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, you all should be flattered. In Florida, Governor Rick Scott has enacted very similar policies and is promoting many of the higher education reforms that are yielding promising results here.

In this and other statements, Perry consistently emphasized that other states recognized and envied Texas’s success in education reform and economic growth. In 2002, he noted: “Education leaders around the country refer to our progress as the Texas Miracle.” In two 2006 speeches, Perry praised policymakers and education leaders for their success strengthening public schools; at a statewide education summit, he described Texas as outperforming other states:

Our record in improving education tells a remarkable story that no other state in America can match. Scores on national assessments have gone up in every age group, ethnicity and subject area, and the achievement gap has steadily gone down. We are the first state in America to make a college prep curriculum the standard coursework in high school, the first to provide individualized study guides for struggling students, and the first to tailor individualized graduation plans for students at risk of dropping out. We lead the nation in the number of students taking advanced math courses, and total enrollment in pre-K.

Again that year, Perry announced to the Texas Business and Education Coalition: “The facts show that no other state in America can measure up to the progress Texas has made in improving education...what we have accomplished...has been nothing short of revolutionary.” These comments reveal the extent to which Perry saw Texas, and himself, as a national leader in higher education reforms to increase efficiency and outcomes.

Perry stressed high expectations but assured Texans that their state was always the envy of others. His messaging balanced calls for reform with affirmation of progress, and he conveyed perennial pride in Texas as a state and Texans as a people. For Perry, Texas was a leader and a trailblazer in higher education and other areas; yet, the governor posits the state should not rest on its laurels and should always do better in order to stay ahead. Even as the state improved on metrics of achievement and national benchmarks, Perry continued to call for greater strides forward and ongoing leadership; in 15 years, his work was never done. Through this emphasis on leadership and competitiveness and in the three preceding themes of agenda setting, reform priorities, and workforce development, Perry positioned himself as an education reformer committed to promoting economic growth for Texas. He appealed directly to his constituents’ pride in Texas as a national leader, positioning the need for more accountable, efficient, and affordable higher education as pivotal to the state’s ongoing leadership and competitiveness.

Discussion

This study reinforces work by Lane and Adler (1988), McLendon (2003), and Christakis (2009) on the critical role of governors as policy entrepreneurs and agenda setters in higher education. The findings discussed above present Perry as a governor who engaged in both the broad work of agenda setting and the narrower, more focused work of a policy entrepreneur. Governor Perry approached higher education with an overarching agenda that he communicated regularly and consistently; his statements about the value of higher education and the importance of ongoing reforms

elevated higher education as a key priority during his tenure. But, rather than delegate that priority to the Legislature to consider and develop, Perry took an active role in crafting and facilitating the progress of policies that aligned with his higher education agenda. His role in relation to higher education combined agenda setting with policy entrepreneurship: he charted a course for the state, then engaged directly with legislators throughout the policymaking process to garner support, build coalitions, and ensure the outcomes he desired.

This view of Perry as highly engaged in higher education policy supports his reputation as a higher education reformer who tangled with university affairs through his regental appointments, interference with university leadership, alliance with the conservative Texas Public Policy Foundation, and support for implementing the Foundation's productivity reforms, such as the Seven Breakthrough Solutions (Burka, 2012; Hamilton, 2011b). In 2009 during the 81st Legislature, Perry signed House Bill 51 (HB 51) and established the Texas Research Incentive Program (TRIP), an effort to increase the number and capacity of Tier 1 research universities in the state. HB 51 provided matching funds to double the impact of private investments in Texas's emerging research institutions. Establishing the TRIP – which remains, over 10 years later – underscores Perry's commitment to higher education as a vehicle for economic productivity, competitiveness, and Texan leadership. TRIP funds have resourced efforts such as the Texas Biomedical Device Center at UT Dallas and the Laser Capture Microdissection System for High Impact Life Science Research at UT El Paso (University of Texas System, 2015). Research in these areas paves the way for high-paying, high-skill jobs that will advance the Texas economy.

Perry's articulation of higher education as a priority for Texas also illustrates the concepts of political framing and priming (Weaver, McCombs, & Shaw 1998). Governor Perry primed constituents to receive and support his higher education policy ideas by presenting college as a transformational opportunity and a vehicle for economic prosperity and success; few would oppose such widely shared values, making them effective in raising support for his cause. Primed to view higher education as an opportunity for individual and state economic mobility, constituents were more likely to accept his policy ideas for improving higher education's efficiency, accountability, and affordability – ideas such as \$10,000 bachelor's degree programs, or HB 51's resourcing for emerging research universities. Perry also approached higher education in ways that aligned strategically with traditional Texan values and ideals: workforce emphasis, economic development, and competitiveness and leadership. These themes in Perry's higher education agenda served not only to present his own values, they also reflected values his Texas constituents would appreciate and understand. Governor Perry made higher education a key priority by tying the issue to values and ideals that would resonate with Texans of all backgrounds. Texas was great and its people had great potential – but higher education had to improve in order to provide the opportunities and economic growth they deserved.

Lastly, Perry communicated through his own home style to at least three of his four constituency groups. By nature of communicating to the people of Texas, Perry addresses his geographic constituency. His focus on Texan exceptionalism relies on some level of geographic connection within the state. Furthermore, Perry's emphasis on accountability and treating higher education institutions as businesses clearly relates to both his primary and re-election constituency. Conservative Republican voters, a vital electoral group both for re-election and earning the party nomination, by and large support business and free enterprise (Francia et al., 2005). Such voters also support a greater efficiency in government. Perry speaks to this "small government is the best government" faction throughout his speeches, especially when talking about increased efficiency and \$10,000 degrees. Ironically, Perry's demands for greater accountability, transparency, and efficiency likely have the opposite effect for institutions – these demands translate to "big government" for universities. Incentivizing research activity might also be seen as adapting the missions and priorities of teaching-focused institutions in the name of economic productivity. By relaying his goal of making higher ed-

education more efficient and economically relevant, Perry advocates for his preferred policy position while speaking to his conservative and business-minded political base. These examples suggest a cultivated home style by which Perry speaks directly to his constituents.

Significance and Implications

Governor Perry's political discourse reflects many of the conservative higher education reform efforts at play across the country (Kelly, 2014; Olson, 2015). As the voices of policymakers and the media can too easily dominate these reform conversations, it is critical that higher education scholars identify and analyze this discourse in order to participate in shaping the future of our colleges and universities. It is particularly important to note that themes emerging from analysis of Perry's speeches from 2000-2015 continue to arise in today's higher education landscape, where performance funding exists in nearly two-thirds of U.S. states (National Conference on State Legislatures, 2018) and the U.S. Secretary of Education advocates openly for privatization and alternatives to public education (Strauss, 2018). College and university stakeholders – from students and families to faculty, administrators, and boards – must question the overarching narrative surrounding higher education and consider the political agendas of those in power. This study contributes to the limited literature on governors' higher education agendas (Christakis, 2009) and reinforces the need for further examination of their role as agenda setters and policy entrepreneurs – particularly at this time of endangered public support and rising political siege against the value of higher education.

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Appendix A

The Education Speeches of Rick Perry

Speech Date	Speech Occasion	Legislative Session
1/15/15	Outgoing address	84
1/29/13	State of the State	83
10/4/12	Competency Based Learning & Technology	82
10/1/12	Meeting Growing Demand in Higher Education	82
2/8/11	State of the State	82
1/18/11	Inaugural address	82
5/19/10	Investment in Education as Key to Competitiveness	81
11/16/09	Investment in Education Robotics Programs	81
10/15/09	Plan to Expand High Tech Education	81
5/7/09	Celebrating Progress in Higher Education	81
1/27/09	State of the State	81
2/6/07	State of the State	80
2/1/07	Higher Education Reform	80
1/16/07	Inaugural address	80
3/23/06	Statewide Education Summit	79
2/21/06	Texas Business and Education Coalition	79
5/13/05	Texas Public Education Foundation	79
1/26/05	State of the State	79
1/27/04	TASA and TASB Regarding Education Reform	78
4/14/04	Educational Excellence and Property Tax Relief	78
4/3/04	The Education Plan	78
3/9/04	Education Availability	78
1/26/04	Educational Excellence Initiatives	78
1/12/04	Announcement of Texas Education Commissioner	78

2/11/03	State of the State	78
1/21/03	Inaugural address	78
5/6/02	Higher Education Initiatives	77
3/14/02	State of Education in Texas	77
8/3/01	Proposed Reforms in Higher Education	77

Appendix B

Summary Statistics of Keywords in 28 Speeches Given by Governor Perry

Keyword	Mean Number of Mentions	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Agenda Setting</i>				
Education	11.60714	7.866192	0	30
Higher Education	1.892857	2.910254	0	10
<i>Accountability</i>				
Tuition	0.5357143	0.9222413	0	3
<i>Efficiency</i>				
Deregulation	0.0357143	0.1889822	0	1
<i>Affordability</i>				
Affordability	0.0714286	0.2622653	0	1
Financial Aid	0.8571429	1.532712	0	6
Debt	0.2142857	0.4986755	0	2
Financial Need	0.1071429	0.4162697	0	2
Merit	0.0357143	0.1889822	0	1
<i>Economic and Workforce Development</i>				
Workforce/Jobs/Employment	5.214286	6.172563	0	22

Business/Economy	4.25	4.933821	0	18
Innovation/10K Degree/CBE	0.1428571	0.4483951	0	2
<i>Leadership and Competitiveness</i>				
Freedom and Opportunity	3.535714	2.987407	0	10
Middle-Class	0.1071429	0.3149704	0	1
Access/Access Institutions	1.535714	2.081348	0	8